This executive summary provides an overview of the second year (June 2003 – May 2004) of the external evaluation of the First 5 LA Family Literacy Initiative. In the following pages, we describe the focus of the evaluation, data sources drawn upon for the analysis, key findings from Year 2, and next steps for the evaluation. A full report is also available.

Overview of the Evaluation

The First 5 LA Family Literacy Initiative provided funding for three interrelated components:

1. Expansion and enhancement grants to 15 family literacy programs throughout LA County providing adult education classes, parenting education classes, early childhood education (ECE) services, and parent-child interactive literacy activities (PCILA) to families with children birth to age five.
2. The Family Literacy Support Network (FLSN), which provides training and technical assistance to the grantees as well as outreach to other programs in the County and engages in advocacy work for the field of family literacy.
3. A four-year evaluation of the implementation of the First 5 LA Family Literacy Initiative and its impacts on children birth to five and their families.

The Initiative-wide evaluation, being conducted through a partnership between the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the Center for Improving Child Care Quality (CICCQ) at UCLA, is both formative (i.e., interim findings are reported on an annual basis in order to enhance implementation and program results) and summative (i.e., program impacts will be described at the end of three years of program implementation). The first year of the evaluation focused primarily on implementation issues. While the second year of the evaluation continued to explore implementation issues, we also report some short-term outcomes observed in families participating in the programs. Specifically, the second year of the evaluation addressed eight key questions, stemming from the questions outlined by the Commission at the outset of the Initiative:

1. What is the range of family literacy program characteristics?
2. What is the range of family literacy participant characteristics and experiences within the programs?
3. What were the challenges and successes in the implementation of the programs?
4. How have First 5 LA grants benefited family literacy programs?
5. What short-term changes can be observed among families participating in the programs?
6. What is the range of activities in which the FLSN has engaged?
7. What were the challenges and successes in the implementation of the FLSN?
8. What is the impact of FLSN support on the programs?

Questions outlined by the Commission at the outset of the Initiative that were not addressed in Years 1 and 2 will be addressed in Years 3 and 4.
Data Collection and Analysis

In order to assess implementation of the Initiative and impacts of the grantee programs and the FLSN, the evaluation team collected data from six primary sources in Year 2:

1. Surveys of 15 grantee program directors; 89 ECE, PCILA, parenting education, and adult education teachers; and 343 parents.

2. Interviews or focus groups with program directors; members of the FLSN staff; and family literacy program teachers, representing each of the four components.

3. Reports and documents submitted by the FLSN and the grantees (e.g., grantee Year-end Reports, FLSN quarterly reports, FLSN internal evaluation materials).

4. Observation of several FLSN training activities and technical assistance site visits.

5. Data collected for the child outcomes study (e.g., classroom observations, direct child assessments, parent interviews) on a sample of approximately 100 three- and four-year-old children and their parents participating in the family literacy programs.

6. Participant data downloaded from the online data system (e.g., attendance, demographics, Desired Results Developmental Profiles (DRDP), California Even Start Performance Information Reporting System (CA-ESPIRS), Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Reading assessment).1

Data collected from these sources were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. It should be noted that data downloaded from the online data system (most notably the attendance data) presented considerable challenges for analysis.2 Many of the data errors and problems with missing or incomplete information could be addressed with additional follow up with program staff and data recoding, though we expect attendance rates to be somewhat inflated as a result of underreporting program hours offered to participating families. This may limit our ability to detect a relationship between participant outcomes and program participation. With this caveat in mind, a summary of key findings is presented below.

Year 2 Findings

In this section, we highlight key findings that emerged from our analysis. Findings are organized by the evaluation questions addressed in Year 2.

1 Two additional months (June and July 2004) were added to the end of Year 2 for all analyses of assessment data (DRDP, CASAS, and CA-ESPIRS) to ensure that the post-tests for Year 2 are captured.

2 We observed three primary problems with the attendance data which limit our ability to report accurate attendance rates and to link attendance with participant outcomes. 1) Programs used different definitions of program components when reporting hours attended (e.g., some reported PCILA hours as ECE hours for their participants while others double-counted PCILA hours as both ECE and PCILA, some programs counted child care as part of ECE while others counted it separately). Follow up with program staff enabled us to adjust for most of these differences. 2) The number of hours “offered” to each family (which is used in calculating attendance rates) varied widely for participants within programs and was sometimes less than the number of hours attended, resulting in attendance rates over 100 percent. We addressed this problem by capping monthly attendance rates at 100 percent. 3) Programs were inconsistent in their recording of attendance data when a family was absent for the entire month (e.g., instead of entering 0 hours attended and 60 hours offered, grantee staff often entered 0 hours attended and 0 hours offered or left both blank for the month, resulting in inflated attendance rates.)
What is the range of family literacy program characteristics?

Among the program characteristics examined in Year 2 were teacher qualifications, which vary widely across components.

- Eighty-one percent of all family literacy teachers surveyed reported having at least a Bachelor’s degree. There was some variability across components, though, with virtually all adult education (exclusive of parenting education) teachers (98%) reporting at least a Bachelor’s degree and 59 percent of ECE teachers surveyed reporting this level of education.
- Adult education teachers (exclusive of parenting education teachers) were also most likely to be certified; two-thirds (67%) of all adult education teachers surveyed reported having at least one Adult Education Teaching Credential.
- Half of all ECE teachers (53%) and PCILA teachers (56%) surveyed reported having at least a child development teacher permit; another six percent of ECE teachers and seven percent of PCILA teachers had an associate teacher permit or a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (equivalent to two to four college courses), authorizing them to provide instruction in a child care and development program without supervision. Four out of 10 ECE teachers (41%) and PCILA teachers (39%) have no child development permit or credential.
- As a whole, the average family literacy program teacher surveyed was very experienced. On average, adult education teachers surveyed reported nearly 11 years, ECE teachers reported 10 years, and parenting education teachers reported just over eight years of experience in their field. PCILA teachers appear to be the least experienced in their field, with an average of just under four years of experience as a PCILA teacher.

In addition to teacher qualifications, the quality of instruction in each of the four components is also dependent on the nature of the curriculum covered. ECE teachers and adult education teachers are most likely to rely on a formal curriculum; parenting education teachers are least likely to use a formal curriculum.

- More than three-quarters (77%) of the ECE teachers surveyed reported that they use a formal curriculum, such as Creative Curriculum or High Scope, in their classroom.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of adult education teachers surveyed reported that they use a formal curriculum; two-thirds of these teachers (63%) reported using a district curriculum or course outline.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of PCILA teachers surveyed reported using a formal curriculum for PCILA activities; many cited parents reading with their children as a routine activity during PCILA.
- Fewer formal curricula exist for parent educators, so it is not surprising that fewer teachers in the parenting education component (47%) reported using some formal curriculum, such as their district’s adult parenting course curriculum. Ninety-one percent of parenting education teachers surveyed reported that significant attention is given during their parenting classes to child development, how parents can support their children’s learning, and activities that parents can do during PCILA time.

The benefits of family literacy are expected to increase with greater integration of all four components. We continued to see some variability across programs in the extent to which components were integrated with each other.

- One-third (33%) of all program directors surveyed reported that they held meetings with teachers from each of the four components to integrate instruction on at least a monthly basis; one-third (33%) reported meeting less frequently; and another third (33%) reported that these
meetings did not occur on a regular basis at all. In programs where teachers from all four components did not meet, it was usually the adult education teacher who did not participate.

- More than half of adult education teachers (58%) and parenting education teachers (56%) surveyed reported that they modify their curriculum to cover topics being discussed in other components.
- Only 48 percent of ECE teachers surveyed reported that they change their curriculum to incorporate topics from other components. However, several ECE teachers noted that they keep teachers of the other components informed of their curriculum so that ECE themes can be reinforced in other components.

What is the range of family literacy participant characteristics and experiences within the programs?

Information on participant demographics collected in Year 2 was consistent with Year 1 findings. The majority of families participating in grantee programs speak Spanish as their home language, are economically disadvantaged, and have little prior formal education.

- The vast majority of families participating in grantee programs in Year 2 are Hispanic (95%) and list Spanish as their primary home language (91%). In addition, more than two-thirds of families have a household income of $20,000 or less (69%), and 76 percent receive some financial, medical, housing, or food assistance. Ten percent of families have been in the U.S. for two years or less.
- A large majority of parents (79%) have had no previous schooling in the U.S., more than one-third (36%) have an eighth-grade education or less, and only 13 percent were employed upon entering the family literacy program.
- Almost three-fourths (71%) of participating children are three to five years of age. In addition, 17 percent of participating children have been identified as having a special need (e.g., physical, language, learning, behavior). While only four percent of children were identified by their parents as having an IEP (Individual Education Plan) or IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan), parents of 13 percent of participating children indicated that they did not know if their child had an IEP or IFSP.

Families participating in the 15 family literacy grantee programs ranged widely with respect to the intensity and duration of services they received during Year 2.

- Across the Initiative, 866 children birth to age five and 687 adults participated in grantee programs, comprising 660 families participating all four components.
- The average family attended program services for six to seven months during Year 2. Parents received an average of 192 hours of adult education (such as ESL, GED classes, etc.), 41 hours of parenting education, and 71 hours of PCILA while children received an average of 276 hours of ECE and 77 hours of PCILA. On average, parents attended 29 hours of adult education, seven hours of parenting education, and 10 hours of PCILA per month. Children attended an average of 41 hours of ECE and 11 hours of PCILA per month.
- Attendance rates – calculated by dividing the number of hours attended by the number of hours offered for each month the family was in attendance – were very high, ranging from 79 percent for adult education to 86 percent for parenting education and PCILA. This method of calculating attendance rates (which is standard for Even Start programs) does not take into account months in which families do not attend any hours, which results in somewhat inflated attendance rates. (See Footnote 2 for more information about the interpretation of attendance data analyses.)
What were the challenges and successes in the implementation of the programs?

Year 2 challenges reported by grantee staff were consistent with those reported in Year 1, though achieving long-term program sustainability was the most prominent area of concern in the second year.

- Securing adequate funding for their programs was the challenge most commonly reported by program directors, with 80 percent reporting that this was a large or moderate challenge for them in Year 2.
- Program directors reported that staffing continued to be a challenge for their programs in Year 2, especially with regard to hiring qualified staff for their ECE component (40% of program directors surveyed identified this as a large or moderate challenge) and providing time for staff to receive training (53% reported this was a large or moderate challenge).
- Space also continued to be a challenge in Year 2. Almost half of all program directors surveyed identified as a moderate or large challenge securing appropriate space (47%) or securing permanent space (43%).
- Despite the significant problems noted with missing or incomplete data downloaded from the online data system, relatively few (27%) program directors surveyed rated issues related to data collection and reporting (“collecting data required by First 5 LA” and “using the First 5 LA database system”) as large or moderate challenges.

Program directors were asked to identify their programs’ successes, and many pointed to improvements in their programs and family outcomes as key accomplishments for Year 2.

- The majority of program directors (67%) reported successes related to changes or improvements in their programs and/or with their staff. In particular, the addition of new services – many of which provide hands-on or practical experiences – was a commonly reported success. Program directors identified parents’ satisfaction with the services provided to them and their children as an important indicator of program success.
- Program directors also identified as important program successes the achievements of their families, such as parents progressing to the next ESL level, improvements in adults’ vocational skills and job status, positive reports from kindergarten teachers about former program participants, and high attendance rates overall.
- Our analysis of participation and outcome data also highlight program successes. In particular, 660 families received comprehensive family literacy services in Year 2; adults demonstrated significant growth on measures of reading ability and parenting strategies; and children demonstrated significant growth on multiple measures of child development.

How have First 5 LA grants benefited family literacy programs?

In Year 1, First 5 LA funds helped grantees expand or enhance their programs (including funding some capital expenses such as construction). Year 2 funds helped to support those expanded program activities by funding staff time and resources for new activities, among others expenses.

- Program directors reported using First 5 LA funding in a variety of ways in Year 2 including: funding a backpack book loan program for families, continuing afternoon and Saturday program activities, supporting staff salaries, and purchasing books and supplies.
- When asked how their programs would be different had they not received the First 5 LA funds, five program directors said they would not be able to offer the number of classes currently available to families, four reported that they would have fewer program staff, and three said they would be able to serve fewer families. One program director said the program would not exist at all without the grant.
Training and support from the FLSN has also been an important benefit of the Initiative, and four grantees specifically pointed to the fact that they would not have been able to offer their staff the amount of training that has been made available to them had it not been for the Initiative.

What short-term changes can be observed among families participating in the programs?

We find significant improvements in adult education outcomes for parents participating in the family literacy programs, including significant growth from the first CASAS Reading assessments in Year 2 (Time 1) to the last CASAS Reading assessment in Year 2 (Time 2).

- Parents demonstrated statistically significant growth on the CASAS Reading assessment between Time 1 and Time 2, increasing their scores by an average of 6.6 points.
- Seventy-two percent of adults with “beginning basic skills” on the CASAS Reading assessment at Time 1 (scores of 210 or lower) achieved the Even Start target gain of five points by Time 2; 60 percent of adults at the “low intermediate to advanced” level at Time 1 (scores of 211 or higher) achieved the Even Start target gain of three points by Time 2.
- Sixty-six percent of parents surveyed reported that the program helped them “a lot” to improve their English.

Drawing on data from parent surveys, the first (Time 1) and last (Time 2) administrations of the CA-ESPIRS in Year 2, and parent interviews from the child outcomes study, we also find positive parenting education outcomes.

- A large majority of parents reported that their family literacy program helped them “a lot” to: become a better parent (91%), feel more comfortable sharing books with their children (92%), and to understand how children learn (92%).
- Parents demonstrated significant growth from Time 1 to Time 2 on 10 of 13 indicators measuring parent support for their children’s learning. For example, parents were reading a wider variety of materials, engaging in reading and writing activities more frequently, keeping a larger number of children’s books in their homes, reading to their children more often, visiting the library more often, and becoming more engaged in their children’s education.
- Interviews with parents of the child outcomes study children also revealed significant improvements in the home literacy environment (including the number of books in the home, and how often parents read, sing, or tell a story to their child) from Time 1 to Time 2.

Analyses of data from parent surveys and data from the first (Time 1) and last (Time 2) administration of the DRDP in Year 2 reveal positive child outcomes across the Initiative and across all age ranges.

- The majority of parents surveyed reported that the program helped their child “a lot” to become ready for school (91%) and to learn how to communicate and get along with other children (88%).
- Children across all age groups (0-7 months, 8-17 months, 18-35 months, 3-5 years) demonstrated statistically significant growth in all four “Desired Results” of the DRDP (children are personally and socially competent, children are effective learners, children show physical and motor competence, and children are safe and healthy).
- Children at each age group demonstrated statistically significant growth in communication and language and in emergent literacy skills as measured by the DRDP from Time 1 to Time 2.
The percentage of DRDP items fully mastered by children three to five years old increased significantly from 15 percent at Time 1 to 59 percent at Time 2.

The percentage of children fully mastering all 13 Even Start “reading readiness” items from the DRDP— which focus on language comprehension, language expression, reading skills, interest in books, and writing – increased from less than one percent at Time 1 to 28 percent at Time 2. Nearly two-thirds (64%) demonstrated growth on each of the items not fully mastered at Time 1.

Analyses of data from the child outcomes study reveal significant growth for three- and four-year olds on direct child assessments between the first assessment (Time 1) and the second assessment (Time 2) given five months later, on average.

- Both three- and four-year-old children participating in the child outcomes study demonstrated significant growth in their ability to solve applied problems, count numbers, and name numbers and letters from Time 1 to Time 2.
- Interviews with child outcomes study parents at Time 1 and Time 2 revealed significant growth in children’s prosocial behaviors (e.g., “makes friends easily”) and positive approaches to learning (e.g., “enjoys learning”).
- Overall, no correlations were observed between measures of child development and the number of hours of ECE service received.3

What is the range of activities in which the FLSN has engaged?

During Years 1 and 2, the FLSN provided 14 unique trainings on a variety of topics, several of which were repeated for various audiences for a total of 24 trainings over the two-year period. While some trainings focused exclusively on the needs of the grantees, others were open to non-grantee program staff.

- The FLSN held five mandatory trainings for grantees, three of which focused on improving the quality of one or more program components; the remaining two focused on reviewing grantee deliverables and requirements, clarifying FLSN services, and performance planning.
- The FLSN held nine additional training events, which covered topics such as sustainability, preparing presentations, administering the DRDP and CA-ESPIRS, and using data. The FLSN also sponsored several three-day National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) trainings on the Foundations of Family Literacy.
- In addition to the 15 grantees, staff from more than 100 non-grantee agencies attended one or more of the FLSN’s training events.

Over the course of Years 1 and 2, the FLSN engaged in a variety of technical assistance activities, the bulk of which occurred during periodic site visits to each of the grantee programs.

- According to the FLSN’s records, FLSN staff conducted 270 visits to grantee program sites to provide technical assistance during the course of the first two years of the Initiative. Some grantee programs were provided with more support than others – visits ranged by program from nine to 27 visits during this period.
- Technical assistance was customized, and topics covered by FLSN staff varied widely by grantee, though support related to First 5 LA deliverables and requirements made up a significant portion of the technical assistance provided to every grantee.

3 Issues related to attendance data outlined in footnote 2 may have affected the analysis of child outcomes and attendance.
Other topics covered during these visits included program improvement (e.g., increasing integration, providing research on best instructional practices, assistance with self study), sustainability (e.g., reviewing grant applications, suggesting funding opportunities to explore), program management or administrative issues (e.g., help with managing collaborators and partners, staffing issues), administering assessments and collecting data, and use of the online data system.

In addition to training and technical assistance, the FLSN engaged in a number of outreach, advocacy, and sustainability activities in Year 2.

- Outreach activities in Year 2 included providing grant-writing technical assistance to several non-grantee programs; publishing and distributing the FLSN newsletter, E-News, and Sustainability Bulletin; presenting at several conferences; and meeting with Head Start staff, Ad Council representatives, and the Family Involvement Network to share information.
- Advocacy activities in Year 2 included sitting on the Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP) Workforce Development and Parent Engagement committees, maintaining communications with the director of California Even Start, and advocating for grantee programs on a local level upon request.
- Sustainability activities in Year 2 included pursuing a contract with the California Department of Education (CDE) to provide training and technical assistance to Even Start programs statewide, presenting information about the Initiative to the LAUP Building on Existing Infrastructures Task Team, and submitting a grant application, along with 26 partners, to the U.S. Department of Education to conduct ECE professional development training.

What were the challenges and successes in the implementation of the FLSN?

Based on interviews with FLSN staff as well as feedback from the grantees, we highlight a number of challenges faced by the FLSN in Year 2, most notable of which was the staff turnover rate.

- The staff turnover rate at the FLSN has been high, especially among consultant facilitators. Though this has meant that the “face” of the FLSN has changed (in some cases several times) for the grantees, the grantee advisor has been able to maintain continuity and ease each transition.
- Partly due to staff turnover, the FLSN has been consistently understaffed. This, combined with the substantial scope of work, has led to FLSN staff feeling like there is not enough time to accomplish their goals.
- Another challenge noted by FLSN staff was the difficulty of translating difficult concepts and methodologies through their training and technical assistance work into a form that paraprofessionals can use in their work.
- Program directors also cited several unmet needs that the FLSN could address. For example, program directors expressed the need for more information on adult basic education (ABE), parenting education, ECE services for children birth to three, and use of the CASAS assessment. Grantee staff also indicated an interest in having more opportunities for collaboration and/or informal discussion with their peers.
- Finally, the prevalence of data problems and lack of consistency in the definition of variables related to documenting program activity suggests that additional training for grantee program staff is needed here as well.
The FLSN has achieved many successes, as demonstrated by the establishment of a more solid infrastructure and high praise from grantee program staff.

- When we asked FLSN staff about their biggest successes and accomplishments in Year 2, seven of nine interviewees cited a more solidified infrastructure or more clearly defined roles for FLSN staff and collaborators.
- All grantee program directors surveyed reported that the content of FLSN trainings was relevant, appropriate, and clear. Only seven percent felt they could just as easily have obtained the information elsewhere.
- All grantee program directors surveyed reported that the information on First 5 LA requirements provided through FLSN technical assistance was timely and complete, that the technical assistance was customized to their program, and that they were satisfied with the technical assistance overall.
- In addition, according to the FLSN’s records, the FLSN staff made contacts with almost 300 non-grantee organizations through their outreach work, extending their reach well beyond the 15 grantee programs.
- The FLSN has also taken steps toward achieving sustainability, for example through the development of new work with the CDE.

What is the impact of FLSN support on the programs?

Program staff’s reports of the impacts of FLSN support on their programs have been very positive overall, with support for meeting their grant requirements identified as the most helpful aspect of their training and technical assistance received in Year 2.

- Grantee program directors reported that the support they received from the FLSN helped them to improve their programs in a number of ways. Program director ratings for the FLSN were very high overall; focusing on only the highest rating (“very helpful”) helps us to identify the areas of greatest impact. Most notably, a large majority of program directors reported that they received “very helpful” support for completing their First 5 LA reports (93%) and networking with other family literacy programs (85%).
- More than half of all program directors surveyed reported that they received “very helpful” support for improving parenting education (56%), adult education (56%), and PCILA (55%). Sixty-two percent reported receiving “very helpful” support for improving ECE, an area the FLSN has given somewhat more attention in Year 2.
- Sustainability and use of data were somewhat less likely to be identified by program directors as areas where support has been “very helpful,” though grantee responses were still very positive overall.

Next Steps: Year 3 Evaluation Activities

Findings from Years 1 and 2 of the evaluation, in combination with research questions yet to be addressed, point to a number of issues to explore further in Year 3. In particular, the quality of the ECE component and the level of integration across components will be important to assess in greater depth. In addition, we will gather more information about the impact of the FLSN on organizations outside of the 15 grantees. Further analysis of family outcomes will also be conducted, using similar data sources to those used in Year 2. To this end, Year 3 will focus on the following activities:

1. Site visits to each program in the spring of Year 3 to follow up with program staff on issues raised in Years 1 and 2. Site visits will include observations and evaluations, using the Early
Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), of ECE classrooms and observations of other program activities where possible.

- Additional surveys and/or short interviews with non-grantees who have participated in FLSN activities to assess FLSN impacts beyond the 15 grantees receiving First 5 LA funds.

- Continued data collection and analysis for the child outcomes study, including a third round of assessments, a kindergarten follow-up, and a more thorough analysis of data from a comparison group of children.

- Continued analysis of adult and child outcome data collected by the grantees, including examination of the relationships between parenting outcomes and child outcomes.

- Identification of the characteristics associated with “successful” programs as measured by parent and child outcomes.

In addition to the work of collecting and analyzing data for the evaluation, AIR has also begun to develop an alternative data collection system for grantee use in anticipation of the termination of the contract supporting the online data system. Combined with additional training from the FLSN, we expect that this new system will result in fewer data problems and more accurate participation data to use in the evaluation and for the continuous quality improvement work of the grantees.